

# Mindful Speech

## Guided Meditation

Date / Time:

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

Thoughts?  Heart?  Body?  None

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



## MEDITATION

One of the most important ways to free ourselves from suffering is to be mindful in how we speak.

Yes, this means not criticizing unnecessarily, gossiping, or being unkind. But taking a step back, it can also be viewed as how we communicate with other beings.

Meditation retreats practice silence because we use up a TON (up to 80%) of our energy on speaking. You don't realize how much focus you put on making small talk – on filling up silence, on trying to look good in front of other people - until you can't.

When we are silent, we're able to tune in more easily to the harshest conversations – the ones we have with ourselves.

But real life involves speaking and communicating. And in order to have healthy relationships with other people, mindful communication is essential.

Mindful speech is about being conscious about not only what words we use, but how we deliver them. Mindful speech also involves mindful listening.

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It's about:

- Noticing if we're just waiting for the other person to finish speaking so we can have our say, and changing our focus to actually listening to them
- Holding space for someone when they are expressing difficulty, rather than perhaps trying to "fix" them or their situation with our words
- Being conscious of the intention behind what we're saying, and being more honest about it.

For example, when I say to my partner, "When was the last time you went to the gym?" What I might actually mean is: "I'm worried that you're not getting enough exercise, and that it's affecting your health and your levels of happiness."

Or, "When you don't get exercise, you get on my nerves."

Or, if I'm feeling hurt by what someone said to me, I might lash out, rather than say, "I'm feeling hurt right now."

Being reactive in our speech comes so easily to us that we don't even realize we're doing it most of the time.

Hospice worker Christine Longaker writes, "You must listen with your whole being, not just your ears."

We practice meditation during specific time periods, but mindfulness is part of all of life. And life involves speaking and communicating. This is a great way to weave mindfulness into our everyday.

(pause...)

In the following exercises, please pair up with another person. While the speaker speaks, the listener can nod silently, but they cannot respond in any other way.

While you're doing this – speaking and listening - let your body be your anchor. Choose some touch points for this – it might be your breathing, your stomach, your hands. Return to them as often as possible while you're sharing this communication.

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When you're listening, try to really present and let go of your own thoughts or your agenda for the conversation. This doesn't mean you have to agree with what the other person is saying, but rather that you're honouring them by offering them your full presence.

Lastly: pay attention to the pauses. Pay attention to your body – to the feeling of needing to take up space with speech, or to say something useful. What does that feel like?

**1. Share something that's bothering you or that you're struggling with in your life right now. You have 3 minutes.**

When 3 minutes are up, the listener can respond, but only with, "I heard you say...". No giving of advice or opinions, no getting into your own stories. Listener, while you're responding, pay attention to how it feels to be mirroring back at the other person what they just said.

Then switch it up.

After you've both had a turn, reflect and converse (mindfully) on how it went. When you were talking, how did it feel to know you had that space? To know that you had that time to speak, uninterrupted?

When you were listening, how was it to listen and not have the pressure of feeling like you had to say something smart and insightful?

**2. Have a conversation about mindful speech in your life. What issues do you come up against? What issues do you have with other people close to you? Give yourselves each only 2 minutes to talk - after that, it's over to the other person. But in between those 2 minutes, pause for 30 seconds.**

Afterwards, have a mindful exchange. What was that like? How was it different from a normal conversation you might have?

Finally, share, reflect or write on how you might practice mindful speaking and listening in your daily life.

(pause...)

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*“Nothing can survive without food. Everything we consume acts either to heal us or to poison us. We tend to think of nourishment only as what we take in through our mouths, but what we consume with our eyes, our ears, our noses, our tongues, and our bodies is also food. The conversations going on around us, and those we participate in, are also food. Are we consuming and creating the kind of food that is healthy for us and helps us grow? When we say something that nourishes us and uplifts the people around us, we are feeding love and compassion. When we speak and act in a way that causes tension and anger, we are nourishing violence and suffering.”*

— Thích Nhất Hạnh, *The Art of Communicating*

